

Howland Wood - Curatorial

Johnson, Burdette Garner
[St. Louis Stamp + Coin

1933-1936

St. Louis, Mo]

November 22, 1933.

Mr. B. G. Johnson
St. Louis Stamp & Coin Co.
408 Olive Street
St. Louis, Mo.

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Do you happen to have in stock any of those small silver coins about the size of a dime or half dime made in Chinese Turkestan about fifty years ago? On one side are Chinese characters and on the other are Arabic characters. Several years ago you were under the impression you had a number of these tucked away somewhere but were unable to locate them.

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

Curator

TREASURY DEPARTMENT
Washington

Office of
DIRECTOR OF THE MINT

August 23, 1935.

Dear Sirs:

Enclosed is license number 18, on form TGL-11, authorizing the exportation of certain rare gold coins, which license has been issued to you pursuant to your application of July 16, 1935.

This license should be presented, together with the coins to be exported, to the Postmaster at St. Louis, Missouri.

You will note that the following pieces, which were included in your application for an export license have not been included in "Schedule A" of such license and may not be exported under such license:

Planchet for Kruger Pound, circulated during War
by British.

Blank for Pound circulated by British during War.
The variety without Rim.

Blank for Pound circulated by British during War.

Such pieces were not included in such Schedule for the reason that the Curator of History of the United States National Museum advises me that they "have no special numismatic value."

It further appears that pursuant to the Order of the Secretary of the Treasury of December 28, 1933, as amended and supplemented, a copy of which Order is enclosed, such pieces should have been delivered to the United States. Accordingly, you should forthwith deliver such pieces to the Superintendent of the United States Mint, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who will settle therefor at the rate of \$20.67 per fine troy ounce of gold contained therein. It will be appreciated if you will advise me as to the date on which such pieces are delivered to the Mint.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) M. M. O'Reilly,
Acting Director of the Mint.

St. Louis Stamp & Coin Co.,
408 Olive Street,
St. Louis, Missouri.

August 28, 1935

Director of the United States Mint,
Treasury Department,
Washington, D. C.

Attention: M. M. O'Reilly.
Acting Director of the Mint.

Madam:

Replying to your favor of August 23, in which it is stated that I must surrender the following coins,

Planchet for Kruger Pound, circulated during War
by British.
Blank for Pound circulated by British during War.
The variety without Rim.
Blank for Pound circulated by British during War.

inasmuch as they are of no numismatic value, these coins were bought at much more than their bullion value by us recently in perfectly good faith, as it never occurred to us by any possibility they could be considered as of no numismatic value. Surrendering them for their gold value would mean a considerable loss and furthermore, we are put in the light of having illegally had in our possession these pieces.

I beg to submit herewith a copy of Spink & Son's Numismatic Circular for January, 1930, which is long before any gold question arose either in Great Britain or the United States. These pieces are offered therein under #93,190, together with a description of their method of use. I am sending this in order to show that we acted innocently in the matter and had no reason to believe they could possibly be considered as bullion only and of no numismatic value. They have always been collected by collectors of South African coins.

I hope in view of the above facts you can reconsider your order that I must surrender these pieces at a considerable loss, particularly as having to surrender them would put me in the position of having violated a law of the United States, while certainly there can be no question of my good faith in this matter.

Very truly yours,

ST. LOUIS STAMP & COIN CO.,

By _____
B. G. Johnson.

BGJ:GW.
Enc.



ESTABLISHED 1897

St. Louis Stamp & Coin Co.



Dealers in
COINS, STAMPS,
PAPER MONEY,
AUTOGRAPHS

408 OLIVE STREET

ST. LOUIS, MO.

Dealers in
INDIAN RELICS,
OLD FIREARMS,
CURIOS, ETC.

August 31, 1935

Mr. Holland Wood,
c/o American Numismatic Society,
156 St. & Broadway,
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Wood:

I enclose copies of correspondence which speak for themselves. Mr. Thorson happened to be here today, and I discussed the matter with him. He suggested that I should write you about it.

It is rather a serious matter if the ownership of coins is depending on whether the Curator of History of the National Museum says they are of numismatic value or not. As it happens, the particular pieces involved in this discussion have always had a premium on them ever since the Boer War.

I think it would facilitate matters if you would write me a letter in your official capacity stating that fact. A letter from you as Curator of the American Numismatic Society would carry a good deal of weight.

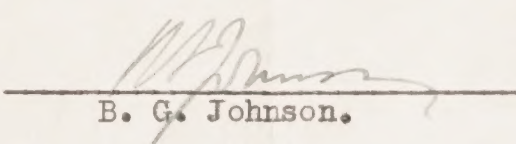
Surrendering these coins would establish a very bad precedent in which any piece might be arbitrarily called of no numismatic value, especially as the party who is apparently rendering the decision has no numismatic knowledge at all as far as I know.

Mr. Thorson is writing a letter to the above effect.

A self-addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed for your reply.

Very truly yours,

BGJ:GW.
Encs.


B. G. Johnson.

September 4, 1935.

Mr. B. G. Johnson
St. Louis Stamp and Coin Co.
408 Olive Street
St. Louis, Mo.

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Your letter of August 31st just at hand concerning the blanks for pounds that circulated in South Africa during the latter days of the Boer War. I am more or less familiar with these pieces and have several times tried to get one properly authenticated. These were struck by the Boers, not by the British as you state in your letter. This was undoubtedly a slip in dictating. They are rare and have always been in demand as the issue was limited and probably most of them were melted down following the war. These are known as Veld Blanks and have gone under the names of Machadodorp blanks and Lydenburg blanks. They come in two forms with and without rims. Most of them show file marks. A good account of these appears in the Numismatic Chronicle of the Royal Numismatic Society for 1934, Part 3, page 195. In case you do not have this publication at hand I am herewith quoting parts. In J. T. Becklake's "Notes on the Coinage of the South African Republic - Veld Blanks":

"These blank pieces ("pond" size) in standard gold were used during the war period also, and are much sought after by collectors. They were taken from the Transvaal Mint and formed part of the famous "Kruger Millions", and are "pond" pieces in a partly completed stage of manufacture. In some instances these pieces are "marked", i.e. they have a raised rim and in others they are perfectly plain. Many of the pieces have a more or less defined circular mark on their flat surface (sometimes on both sides), concentric with the perimeter. This was produced by the "scraping" machine, which reduced the weight of "too heavy" blanks in the Transvaal Mint, and is evidence of genuineness. Its absence, however, must not be taken as evidence of any piece not being genuine, as some pieces did not require to be scraped. Other small but definite differences have been tabulated in order to make it possible to judge of the genuineness of these blanks and the Deputy-Master of the Mint is always pleased to examine specimens sent for inspection.

"It has been frequently stated that the pieces which are "marked" (raised rims) are "Machadodorp blanks", and those which are plain, "Lydenburg blanks". Mr. Kloppers, in answering an inquiry on this point, states, in a very valuable summary of the matter, that "all the coined

September 4, 1935.

"gold and silver, the blanks and a certain quantity of "bar gold" was removed from the Pretoria Mint just before the occupation of Pretoria by the British. This was put on the trains by which several officials, including the Auditor-General, travelled to Middelburg, and was guarded by Z.A.R. Guards. Middelburg was for about a fortnight the 'Capital'. Afterwards the Government moved on to Machadodorp, and from there to Waterval Boven, and, lastly, to Hectorspruit. In the three latter places I saw the Government on wheels myself: at Machadodorp and Waterval Boven, where I had to receive the salaries for the officials in the Noordkaap district; at Hectorspruit, when our Commandos passed through. The salaries, which were paid out to me at Machadodorp and Waterval Boven, were paid 75 per cent. in 'blue backs' and 25 per cent. in properly minted gold coins. At that time 'blanks' were already known, but only the officials had a few of them, and they were then regarded as curios. They had not yet been issued in payment....Only afterwards when the stock of minted gold was exhausted were the blanks issued. There cannot have been many of them. They were probably exchanged at some discount with buyers who still had money in their possession. They were also used to pay for sheep and grain obtained from farmers, though most of the payments were made in 'blue backs' only. The 'blanks' could not be used to buy provisions from the natives, they would not accept them, and at that time were shy of any pounds, except those 'with the horse on it' (St. George and the Dragon). There can, therefore, be no question of either Machadodorp or Lydenburg 'blanks' - at Machadodorp none were paid out, although some officials may have secured a few. After the departure from Hectorspruit the Government wandered with the Commandos from one district to another, and it would be impossible to say in which district and when the blanks were used for payment. Then towards the end of 1901 the Government, after its wanderings, came to Steenkampsberg, where I visited them; there were definitely no coined pounds nor 'blanks'; the Government only had 'blue backs' (printed at Pietersburg) and some bar gold. After that time I printed 'blue backs' at Pilgrims Rest and made bar gold into the Z.A.R. 'Veld Ponde' that you know. These were the only coins ever made on the gold during the war. No 'blanks' were ever made, except at Pretoria."

From this statement of Mr. Ekoppers it is clear that the issue of the "rimmed" and the "plain" blanks cannot be ascribed to any one particular town or district, and that the terms "Machadodorp blanks" and "Lydenburg blanks" are misleading."

I have occasionally seen these quoted in sale catalogues and dealers' lists but do not recall at the present moment what they sell for except that they always went at a considerable premium.

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

Curator

September 4, 1935.

Mr. B. G. Johnson
408 Olive Street
St. Louis, Mo.

Dear Mr. Johnson:

I trust the enclosed letter is satisfactory. You will note I made no mention of your correspondence with the government as I wanted to present an unbiased opinion. I cannot for the life of me see how or why they can confiscate those pieces as they certainly have a numismatic value. Belote evidently gave a snap judgment which he was not qualified in doing.

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

Curator



Dealers in
COINS, STAMPS,
PAPER MONEY,
AUTOGRAPHS

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St. Louis Stamp & Coin Co.

408 OLIVE STREET

ST. LOUIS, MO.



Dealers in
INDIAN RELICS,
OLD FIREARMS,
CURIOS, ETC.

September 6, 1935

Mr. Howland Wood, Curator,
The American Numismatic Society,
Broadway between 155th & 156th Sts.,
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Wood:

Thanks for your favor of September 4,
and the letter is fine.

I did not mean to convey that the coins
were struck by the British, but from people who were
in South Africa at the time, I always understood that
the British got hold of a considerable number of them
and allowed them to circulate more or less officially
toward the close of the war. ^{BY THE BOERS} The planchets were
actually prepared for the striking of Kruger sovereigns
undoubtedly.

This particular case is not so very
important, but if permitted to pass without protest and
a precedent is established without protest, it might
develop very dangerously later on, as some very recent
coin with which this gentleman is not familiar might
be pronounced of no numismatic value and seized, although
it might have great numismatic value.

Naturally, I would not have tried to
export these pieces to Spink if they had not had some
numismatic value.

Very truly yours,

BGJ:GW.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "B.G. Johnson", written in a cursive style.

September 11, 1935.

Mr. B. G. Johnson
St. Louis Stamp & Coin Co.
408 Olive Street
St. Louis, Mo.

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Your letter just at hand and I am glad that you have taken the position that you have and I consider the case important, although no great amount was involved. The government is in no position to determine whether a coin has or has not numismatic value, as unfortunately the government has no numismatist connected with it at the present time. This is no slur on the present Curator of History, who has charge of the collection. He himself makes no claims as such.

Has Missouri issued a sales tax token? If they have, I wish you would send us a couple. I am getting these together - so far I have gotten Colorado, Washington(2 varieties) and Illinois (2 varieties); and I thought I saw in the paper that Missouri was going to have a token.

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

Curator



Dealers in
COINS, STAMPS,
PAPER MONEY,
AUTOGRAPHS

ESTABLISHED 1897

St. Louis Stamp & Coin Co.

408 OLIVE STREET

ST. LOUIS, MO.



Dealers in
INDIAN RELICS,
OLD FIREARMS,
CURIOS, ETC.

September 13, 1935

Mr. Howland Wood, Curator,
The American Numismatic Society,
Broadway Between 155th & 156th Sts.,
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Wood:

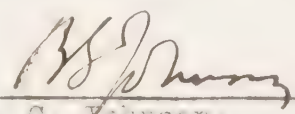
Your favor of September 11th to hand.

I have had no reply to my original letter to the Director of the Mint in connection with the three gold coins. Whether they are taking the matter up further or whether they are simply dropping it I have no way of knowing. I am holding your letter in reserve for use if this matter is revived.

It seems to me that it would be establishing a highly dangerous precedent if I surrendered these coins, which are legitimately rare coins, at the order of a government official who certainly knows nothing about them. That would simply put every gold coin in the United States at the mercy of one man.

Missouri has issued two sales tax tokens, which were printed on milk bottle tops, not struck in metal. I enclose herewith two specimens of each with my compliments. Being printed on milk bottle tops they all have a rather greasy appearance. The back of them is being freely used for writing advertising and political slogans, much to the annoyance of the State authorities.

Very truly yours,


B. G. Johnson.

BGJ:GW.
Encs.

September 17, 1935.

Mr. B. G. Johnson
St. Louis Stamp & Coin Co.
408 Olive Street
St. Louis, Mo.

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Your letter at hand and I have heard nothing either from the mint. I thought possibly I might, as they have occasionally referred matters to me. Many thanks for the milk bottle tops. From our standpoint they are just as interesting as metallic specimens. I rather imagine all these sales tax tokens will be collected just as transportation tokens etc. have been.

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

Curator

COPY

TREASURY DEPARTMENT

WASHINGTON

Office of
Director of the Mint

January 6, 1936.

Attention: Mr. B. G. Johnson

Dear Sirs:

Reference is made to your letter, dated November 13, 1935, with which you transmitted a letter received from Mr. Howland Wood, Curator of the Museum of the American Numismatic Society, New York.

In order that the status of the pieces in question may be definitely established, you are requested to forward them any any similar gold pieces which you may have to this office for an examination. Each piece should be carefully labelled.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) M. M. O'Reilly.

Acting Director of the Mint.

St. Louis Stamp & Coin Co.,
408 Olive Street,
St. Louis, Missouri.

January 7, 1936

Mr. M. M. O'Reilly
Acting Director of the Mint
Treasury Department
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

In accordance with your letter received today, I herewith enclose the three Transvaal Necessity gold coins which are all we have.

I have been in the coin business for over thirty years and during that entire period I have never at any time been able to buy one of these coins for less than eighty to one hundred percent over its bullion value, and shortly after the Boer war, while interest in coins of the Boer Republic was still keen, these pieces sold for from \$20.00 to \$25.00 each. They have been frequently offered in dealers' price lists, always at a premium, and have been sold in auctions, always bringing a premium.

Necessarily, if they had not been coins of a recognized numismatic value, there would have been no reason whatever for my wishing to export them in a consignment of other rare Transvaal pieces.

I make the above statement through no desire to be argumentative or obstinate in the matter, but simply from the fact that these coins do have an admitted recognized numismatic value all over the world, and I should very much hate to be put in a false light in this matter.

Very truly yours,

BGJ:GW.

B. G. Johnson

Enclosed; 3 gold pounds, necessity money issued in the Transvaal during the Boer War.



ESTABLISHED 1897

St. Louis Stamp & Coin Co.

Dealers in
COINS, STAMPS,
PAPER MONEY,
AUTOGRAPHS

408 OLIVE STREET

ST. LOUIS, MO.



Dealers in
INDIAN RELICS,
OLD FIREARMS,
CURIOS, ETC.

January 7, 1936

Mr. Howland Wood, Curator,
The American Numismatic Society
Broadway Between 155th & 156th Sts.,
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Wood:

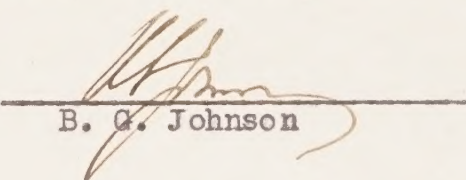
I thought that the matter of the Transvaal gold coins had been definitely settled. I am now in receipt of the letter of which I enclose a copy, and there seems to be nothing to do but send the pieces in.

It is establishing a very bad precedent to be compelled to surrender coins which have always commanded a premium ever since I have been in business. If you can do anything with the party who makes this decision, I think it would be advisable to do so.

You will note that I sent your letter in to the Mint. I have sent a list of Spinks showing the coin offered at a premium. Whatever *other* evidence they require I cannot imagine.

I also enclose a copy of my letter to the Assistant Director of the Mint.

Very truly yours,


B. G. Johnson

BGJ:GW.
Encs.

January 9, 1936.

Mr. B. G. Johnson
408 Olive Street
St. Louis, Mo.

Dear Mr. Johnson:

This letter is confidential. I happened to see Belote a while ago and asked him why he made the decision he did. He took refuge in the fact that the way you had your original invoice worded he could not include them as coins, but simply as blanks, that he himself could not reopen the case but if the matter was brought to him again he could then rule differently. Therefore, I feel confident if the mint authorities consult him again they will return the coins to you. I myself not having been consulted by the mint cannot write them. I have got to write Belote and will tell him that the coins have been sent to Miss O'Reilly.

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

Curator



ESTABLISHED 1897

St. Louis Stamp & Coin Co.



Dealers in
COINS, STAMPS,
PAPER MONEY,
AUTOGRAPHS

408 OLIVE STREET

ST. LOUIS, MO.

Dealers in
INDIAN RELICS,
OLD FIREARMS,
CURIOS, ETC.

January 10, 1936

Mr. Howland Wood, Curator,
The American Numismatic Society,
Broadway Between 155th & 156th Sts.,
New York, N. Y.

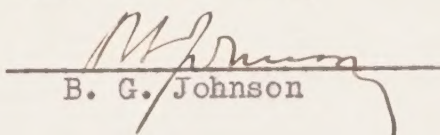
Dear Mr. Wood:

Thanks a lot for the interest you have taken in the matter. I might say that if this were simply a case in which I alone was concerned, I should not have bothered you about it, but it seems to me to be a matter concerning all collectors and dealers, inasmuch as there are so many things that could be seized under such regulations.

It appears to me, furthermore, that seizure of coins of recognized numismatic value and for which far more than the bullion value has been paid by the owner generally long before any gold regulations went into effect, would be illegal under the terms of the Supreme Court's ruling that seizure of gold was illegal but nothing could be done about it unless the owner could prove a loss, but the owner of rare coins certainly could. In fact, there would be the making of a very good test case, apparently the only test case that could be brought. It would not be worthwhile in this case, of course, but I can see where it might be necessary if something of great value is seized.

With best regards, and again thanking
you.

Very truly yours,


B. G. Johnson

BGJ:GW.